

COMMENTARY

# Glimpsing the Beauty of the Eternal

*“At once full of form and full of abundance, at once philosophizing and creating, at once tender and energetic, we see [the Greeks] unite the youth of phantasy with manliness of reason in a glorious humanity.”*  
—Friedrich Schiller

When the Mycenaean civilization described by Homer in his *Iliad* and *Odyssey* collapsed around 1000 B.C., a Dark Age descended upon the Greek world. The Dorian invasions of the Ninth century B.C. drove the remnants of Mycenaean culture across the Aegean Sea to colonize Asia Minor. By the Eighth century B.C., the brutal slavocracy of Sparta had become the unchallenged power of the Greek mainland (even though the great Homeric epic poems, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, were then being sung throughout the Hellenic world). It was from out of this Dark Age of war and chaos, that the dawn of Classical Greek civilization, the first great renaissance of human thought, emerged in the Sixth century B.C.

Before the Sixth century, Hellenic art was based on a specific idea of man: the imperial concept, in which every man is a fixed part of a static social order. At the top of the social pyramid are the ruling elite, the priest caste, and the servants of the imperium. The rest of the population, ninety-five percent, are slaves or serfs, beasts of burden, whose quality of life and position in society, for themselves and for their posterity, never changes.

The *kouros* figures of the Seventh century B.C. are a striking representation of

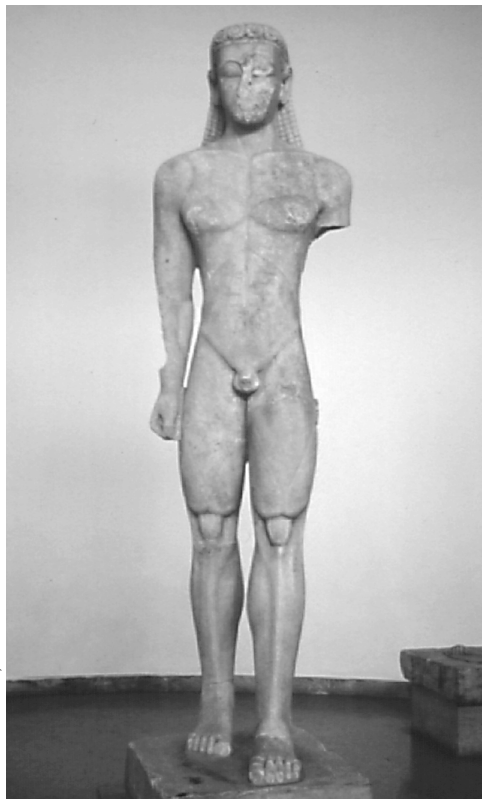
that image of man, reflecting obvious Egyptian, Babylonian, and Assyrian influences on early Greece [SEE Figure 1]. They are always static, heavy and immobile, essentially *bas-reliefs* in four dimensions: the frontal pose, the two side views, and the back. Both feet of the *kouros* are always firmly rooted to the ground; all the weight distributed equally on both legs; arms and hands frozen to the side, with just the barest suggestion of anatomical detail. The *kouros* is, therefore, an archetype—a symbol of an unchanging world, devoid of uniqueness, lacking transformation or development.

The compositional and technical breakthroughs we see in the later Greek Classical Period, which distinguish the greatness of Greek art, are therefore not merely the result of some new “technical

discoveries” in working stone, but reflect instead a changed conception of the nature of man, based on the idea of beauty, individuality, and progress in man’s universe. They reflect, as Lyndon LaRouche has remarked in his recent essay “Behind the Notes” (*Fidelio*, Summer 1997), “the life-like effect of an image . . . as if caught in mid-motion,” an effect which captures the “role of metaphorical qualities of irony” as a celebration of the quality of human cognition that distinguishes mankind from the beasts.

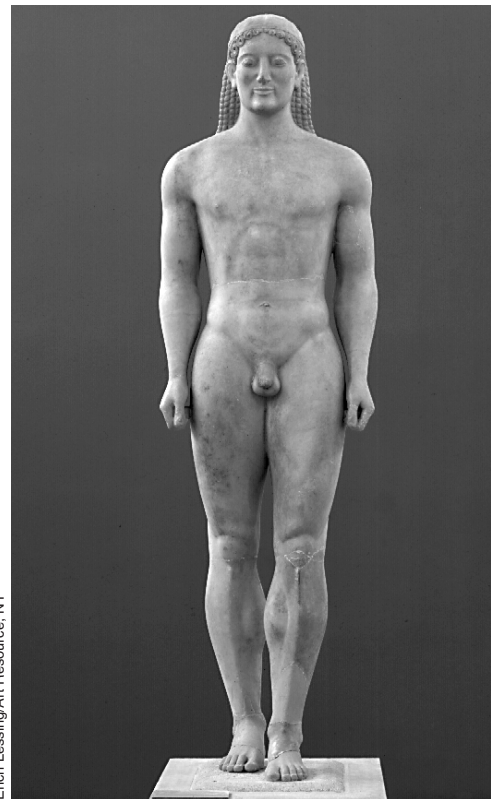
### Revolutionizing the Kouros

This changed view of man began to emerge in Greece in the early half of the Sixth century B.C. The Egyptian-trained Athenian poet Solon assumed the leadership of his bankrupt and



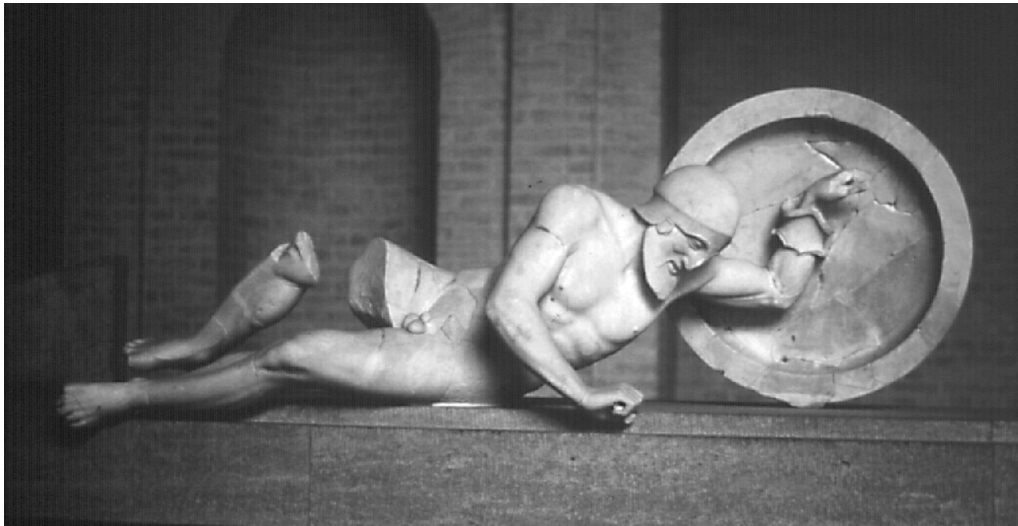
Vanni/Art Resource, NY

FIGURE 1. “Soumian Kouros,” c.600 B.C.



Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY

FIGURE 2. “Anavysos Kouros,” 530 B.C.



Vanni/Art Resource, NY

FIGURE 3. "Fallen Warrior," pediment of the Temple of Aphaia at Aegina, c.490-480 B.C.

fractious home city in 572 B.C., setting into motion a revolution in statecraft. Pre-Socratic philosophers and scientists, such as Pythagoras and Thales of Miletus, voiced new hypotheses about the cosmos, and man's relationship to it. Among the artists nurtured in this revolutionary environment, we see the first, clumsy attempts to portray man as something other than a symbolic archetype.

The "Kouros of Anavysos" from 530 B.C. [SEE Figure 2], representing the youth Kroisos, illustrates just such an attempt. Although the figure is still static and fixed within that traditional compositional framework, the anatomical details are somewhat more finely and firmly chiselled than in the kouroi of the first half of the Sixth and preceding Seventh centuries.

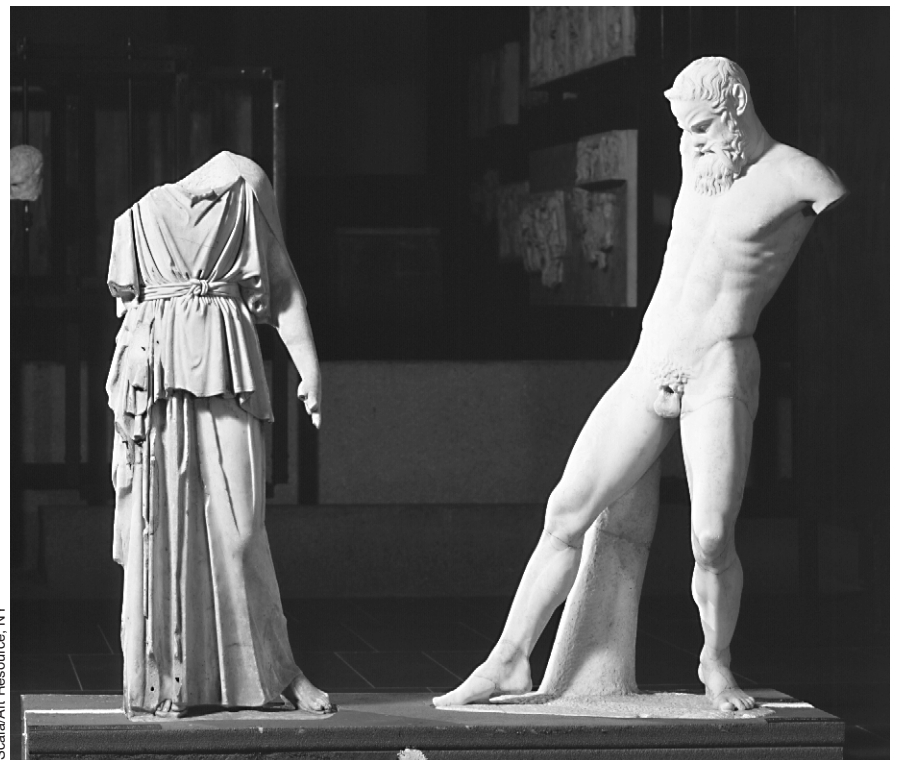
The Fifth century B.C. opened with the revolt of the Ionian city-states against the Persian Empire. In 490 B.C. the Persian Wars began, and the Persian Empire experienced its first major defeat at the hands of the Athenians on the Plain of Marathon. Another crucial year was 480, when the Spartans outfought the Persians at Thermopylae, and Xerxes I of Persia burned Athens and destroyed the Acropolis. Later that same year, the Athenian navy destroyed the Persian fleet at the Bay of Salamis. These wars of resistance to Persian

domination of the Peloponnesus lasted until the independence of the Greek city-states was established at the Peace of Callias in 448.

It was during the early years of the Persian Wars that the transition from the late Archaic to the Classical Period of Greek art began.

### Resistance to Empire

The resistance of the Greek city-states to imperial rule by what was, until that time, the invincible Persian Empire, and their pride in that accomplishment, was certainly reflected in the sculpture of the early Classical Period. The figures from the pediment of the Temple of Aphaia at Aegina, c.490-480 B.C., are among the best examples of the early Classical Period. The sculptor celebrates the freedom of presenting motion and change in frozen stone. A great moment of history, myth, and religion, is portrayed as if a stage scene from a play of Aeschylus or Sophocles, captured at the point of greatest action. If we compare these dramatic scenes of battle and death to the typical *kouros* of only ten to fifteen years earlier, the differences are stunning.



Scala/Art Resource, NY

FIGURE 4. Myron, "Athena and Marsyas," c. 460-450 B.C. (marble copy).

The Temple of Aphaia figures are anatomically correct representations of men at war; the action of battle is captured in mid-motion. Warriors swing their swords down, hammering their opponents' shields; archers draw their bows, about to let fly at the enemy. Figure 3 shows a fallen warrior from the Temple's East Pediment. He has fallen, mortally wounded, perhaps struggling in his last moments to rise again to fight. Yet, the face of this and all the Temple figures remain strangely calm, immobile, unmoved by the death and rage of battle that surrounds them. The dying warrior seems to smile as he meets what the Greeks believed to be the perfect death—death in battle.

Although the years 500-449 B.C. were years of constant war, they were also a time of cultural maturity and economic growth for Hellenic culture, inaugurating the Classical Age. During this period, as the Athenian Maritime Confederacy was being crafted, the Acropolis was rebuilt by the great monumental sculptor and architect, Phidias. The plays of Aeschylus and, later, Sophocles, were performed before audiences that included the young Socrates. These plays, such as the *Orestes* trilogy, were aimed at educating the citizens of Greece, and Athens in particular, to the new ideas of natural law and liberty. Meanwhile, philosophy and science were dominated by the ideas of Anaxagoras, Democritus, and Protagoras, concerning the paradoxes of the Infinite: of the One and the Many, and of motion and rest.

#### Myron: Solution to Paradox

The paradox facing the Greek Classical artist was to create sculpture which was appropriately at rest, yet alive and moving—to thus create a metaphor through which the process of mind animating the sculpted figure could be portrayed. To achieve this, sculptors such as Myron, a contemporary of Phidias, used moments of tension-filled pause, to connect the end of one action with the beginning of another. All the tension of both the preceding and the future

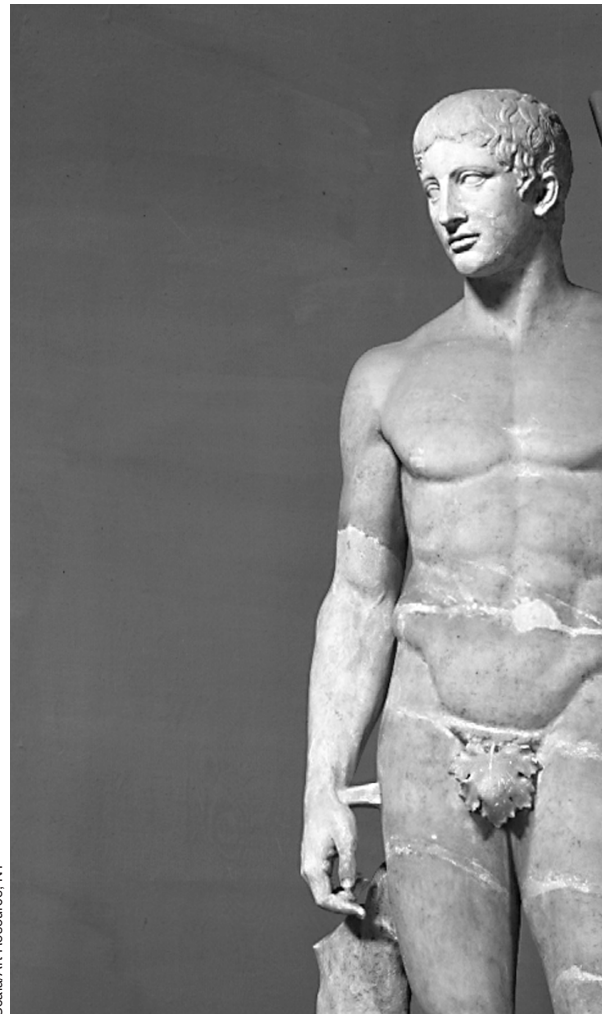
motions is contained in that one instant. Study the famous “Diskobolos” by Myron [SEE inside back cover, this issue], for example. The athlete has just completed placing himself in the necessary position to throw the discus—“winding up,” so to speak—and is now caught at the moment immediately before exploding into the throw. This is the paradox. In this brief pause in the actual motion of throwing the discus, the sculptor captures the grace and beauty of the entire throw, from beginning to end.

This metaphor is repeated again in Myron's “Athena and Marsyas” [SEE Figure 4]. According to legend, the goddess Athena invented the musical pan pipes. But she threw them down in

disgust, when she saw how the beauty of her face was distorted by blowing on them; at which point the satyr Marsyas, enthralled by the sound, ran to pick them up. Myron chooses to present the instant of confrontation between Athena and Marsyas, when the satyr has been startled by Athena and is about to flee, in order to recount the whole story in stone. It is the moment of transition, in which the entire action of the myth is embodied. Unlike the sculptor of the pediment of the Temple of Aphaia at Aegina, Myron does not merely create a freeze-frame of an instant in the action; he instead chooses a necessary *pause*; a moment in the action in which to capture *all past and future action*. The compositional structure highlights the importance of this moment: The invention of the pipes, which rest on

the ground between Athena and Marsyas, was considered by the Greeks to be the beginning of instrumental music.

We see this paradox in the work of another important contemporary of Phidias, the sculptor Polykleitos. Polykleitos' perhaps most important statue is called the “Doryphorus,” or “Spear Carrier” [SEE Figure 5]. A characteristic feature of the sculpture of this period, of which the “Doryphorus” is a brilliant example, is that the tensions between motion and rest are given a harmonious resolution. It is sculpted precisely according to the laws set down by the Polykleitos in a manual, called the *Canon* (for this reason, the “Doryphorus” is also known as the “Canon”), which was used



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FIGURE 5. Polykleitos, “Doryphorus (The Spear Carrier),” 450 B.C. (copy after bronze original).



to educate future generations of Greek sculptors, and influenced the composition of sculpture for millennia to come.

It is important to note, that most of what remains of the works of the great sculptors of mature Classical Period art are actually Hellenistic Greek or Roman copies. Appreciating these works is therefore much like trying to appreciate a great poem in translation. You get the general sense of the structure, the theme and the metaphor, but much of the music is gone, much of the beauty lacking. This is certainly the case with this copy of the “Doryphorus,” which is heavier and less graceful than the descriptions by ancient chroniclers of the original work.

Even in the copy, however, the “Doryphorus” demonstrates a marvelous balance between the static *kouros* and the motion of the early Classical Period. The weight of the body rests on the right leg, muscles tensed; the left leg is placed perhaps in mid-step, no weight, muscles relaxed. The right arm hangs relaxed and free, while the left arm is raised, hand clenching a spear. The shoulders and hips are in harmonic counterposition, and the head is turned and slightly tilted down. Every feature of the “Doryphorus,” every muscle, is simultaneously in motion and at rest.

#### Praxiteles: The Moment of Discovery

The years following Phidias, Myron, and Polykleitos mark a decline in the economic strength and political power of the city-states of the Greek mainland. Unable to conquer the Hellenes by force, agents of the Persian Empire manipulated them into the fratricidal Peloponnesian Wars. Nonetheless, it was in this period that Socrates was teaching in the *agora* of Athens, fighting for the principle of truth; that Xenophon marched across Asia Minor, perhaps writing his *Anabasis*; and that Plato established the Academy at Athens, and set down *The Republic*, the most important work of political statecraft in human history. Philip II of Macedonia ruled a Western Empire, which included Greece; the young

Alexander had not yet been born.

It is fortunate that from this late Classical Period, we have at least one original work from the hand of the great sculptor Praxiteles, the “Hermes and Dionysus” [SEE inside back cover, this issue]. This sculpture meets all the requirements of harmony and balance of the Polykleitos *Canon*; for, despite the anatomical features being softer than those of Myron and Polykleitos, the tension between motion and rest remains. The god Hermes tenderly holds his infant brother Dionysus, tempting him with some object held high in his right hand. Yet, there is a kind of indifference in the face of Hermes, as if he has discovered some new thought and is no longer aware of his brother’s presence. Praxiteles has caught Hermes, not merely in mid-motion, not just at a necessary pause in motion, but at a point of intellectual *discovery*.

We can see that same quality of “in-betweenness” of thought and discovery, in Praxiteles’ “Cnidian Aphrodite” [SEE inside back cover, this issue]. Again, the figure expresses all the beauty of the counterbalance and harmony of Myron or Polykleitos. We see the Goddess just as she has dropped her robe to enter the bath. The eyes are set deeper than normal, creating a darker, shadowed effect. It is as if Aphrodite had discovered, at that moment, that she was being observed, is unconcerned about it, and perhaps a bit pleased. After all, she is the goddess of Love.

It is by capturing the irony, the “in-betweenness” of mid-motion accompanying the moment of thought, that Praxiteles offers us a glimpse of beauty as a reflection of the eternal. For the power of the beautiful, as Socrates instructs Phaedrus in Plato’s dialogue, is “. . . the fourth kind of madness, with which a man is inspired whenever, by the sight of beauty in this lower world, the true beauty of the world above is so brought to his remembrance . . . that he longs to soar aloft; but the power failing him, gazes upward like a bird and becomes heedless of all baser matters.”

—Ted Andromidas

## There Is Fraud in

Like Pinocchio, the more Michael Novak writes, the longer his nose becomes. As Lyndon LaRouche recently wrote in an essay entitled “Michael Novak, Calvinist?—‘Not by Marketplace Alone!’” (*Executive Intelligence Review*, July 4, 1997): “For both practical and spiritual reasons, the most crucial aspect of the New Age corruption which must be reversed, if the U.S.A is to assuredly outlive this century, is the kind of Manicheanism which Michael Novak expresses by his gnostic’s reliance on ‘the magic of the marketplace.’”

In these two books, Novak attempts to cloak his underlying Manicheanism by selective references to Pope John Paul II’s encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, while ignoring the Pope’s calls for debt forgiveness and reform of the international financial system; by extensive quotes from Alexander Hamilton, Abraham Lincoln, and the U.S. Constitution, which ignore the central role of the nation-state; and by references to the concept of man created in the image of God, the Creator, which at best render human creativity an empty construct, and at worse reduce it to piracy.

#### Embrace of Aristotle

The philosophical source of Novak’s corruption is his unabashed embrace of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*, from which he quotes extensively in both books. What Novak fails to mention is, that in the *Politics*, Aristotle argues that slavery is natural, that abortion should be employed to limit population, and that productive labor is ignoble and inimical to virtue. In his *Ethics*, Aristotle begins by rejecting Plato’s idea of the Good, and therefore man’s capacity to participate in the Good, a concept essential to Christianity. Aristotle’s ten moral virtues, discussed in the *Ethics*, not insignificantly omit justice, a concept Novak, like his mentor Friedrich von Hayek, has trouble applying to social policy.

Central to Novak’s argument in both